REMARKS

This Amendment is responsive to the Office Action that was mailed November 6, 2002. The form of this Amendment is the Revised Amendment Format that was announced by the Deputy Commissioner for Patent Examination Policy, Steven Kunin on January 31, 2003. The guidelines for this Revised Amendment Format were found on the "Pre-OG Notices" page of the United States Patent and Trademark Office website. The enclosed Amendment is believed to be in compliance with the Revised Amendment Format in light of those guidelines and the waiver of 37 C.F.R. §1.121.

Applicants extend their gratitude to the examiner for the withdrawal of the species requirements.

Rejection of claims under 35 U.S.C. §112

Claims 122-146 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, and in particular with respect to the use of the terms "gasification system" and "buffer" as used in claims.

Applicants have amended the preamble of claim 122 to recite a gasification system comprising a gasifier. Support for this amendment is found in the specification on page 6, lines 5-14 and in the section entitled "BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION". The claimed invention is specifically directed to a method for withdrawing and dewatering slag from a gasification system. As described in the specification, slag is a byproduct of the partial oxidation reaction of hydrocarbonaceous fuels with oxygen in a gasification reactor or gasifier. This amendment is offered solely for purposes of clarification and should not be construed as narrowing of the claimed methods.

The term "buffer" is used in the specification and claims to refer to an optional storage unit for receiving dewatered slag from the conveying lockhopper, prior to its discharge. See specification page 7, lines 16-25. Read in light of the description provided in Applicants' specification, the meaning of the term "buffer" is believed to be readily apparent.

Rejection of claims under 35 U.S.C. §102(b)

Claims 122-123 and 126-129 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Janka, et al. ("Janka"). It is asserted that Janka discloses a lockhopper for use with a gasification system. Applicants would agree only to the extent that Janka teaches a device for use in delivering coal or oil shale having a specified particle size for use in gasification or liquefaction. See column 6, lines 40-44. More specifically, Janka discloses that "the solid materials with associated liquid are introduced to an inclined screw conveyor for passage to a vessel such as a pressurized reaction vessel." See column 1, lines 12-30. There is no teaching or suggestion in the disclosure of Janka that the disclosed lockhopper and dewatering conveyor could be used or modified for use in withdrawing and dewatering a slag from a gasification system.

Applicants would further point out that the claimed invention is directed to a method of withdrawing and dewatering slag from a gasification system. The claimed method comprises the steps of receiving slag from the gasification system, conveying the slag... and discharging slag. There is no teaching or suggestion in the disclosure of Janka that the disclosed device could be used or modified for receiving anything from a gasification system, or that it could be used or modified for receiving, conveying or discharging a slag material. Therefore, neither claim 122 nor the claims depending therefrom, are believed to be anticipated by Janka.

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 122-123 and 126-129 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Janka.

Rejection of claims under 35 U.S.C. §103(a)

Claims 124-125 and 130-146 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over the combined teachings of Janka and AAPA, Applicants' Admitted Prior Art. However, claims 124-125 and 130-146 are believed to be in condition for allowance by virtue of their direct or indirect dependency from claim 122. As such, the rejection of claims 124-125 and

130-146 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over the combined teachings of Janka and AAPA, is believed to be moot.

Regarding the substance of the rejection of claims 124-125 and 130-146 under §103(a), it is the position of the Office that the use of differing pressures and use of "on hand" gases to force the fluid through the system and/or pressurize it, would have been obvious, since this is the manner that conventional systems operate as discussed by AAPA. Applicants respectfully disagree that the AAPA discloses a slag de-watering device that is capable of pressurization separate and apart from a gasification system.

The AAPA discloses that conventional lockhoppers are vertically oriented cylindrical vessels having top and bottom valves and that the vessel is open to the gasifier during collection mode. See specification page 2, lines 23-25 and bridging to page 4, lines 1-5. The lockhopper is filled with a column of water and is not utilized to de-water the slag. See specification page 3, lines 5-7. Rather, de-watering is achieved through the use of slag sumps, drag conveyors and slag pads. See specification page 3, lines 14-17. As such, the disclosure of AAPA contains no teaching or suggestion that a conventional lockhopper should be modified for use in dewatering slag that is withdrawn from a gasification system. Furthermore, there is no teaching or suggestion in the disclosure of the AAPA that a dewatering device should be capable of pressurization separate and apart from a gasification system.

Janka teaches a vertical lockhopper 10 connected to an inclined conveyor housing 20 with internal auger screw for dewatering a solids material such as coal or oil shale prior to feeding the solids material to a pressurized reactor vessel. The outlet of the housing at reference number 23 is illustrated and described as an opening to a pressurized reactor vessel. There is no teaching or suggestion in Janka that the dewatering conveyor housing should be capable of pressurization separate and apart from a pressurized reactor vessel or a gasification system. As such, there is no teaching or suggestion that conveyor housing 20 should have a valve or other closure means at outlet 23.

Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that Janka is neither directed to nor related to a method of withdrawing slag from a gasification system, there is no

disclosure in AAPA or Janka that would have motivated one skilled in the art to have modified a conventional lockhopper or a solids dewatering device in the manner suggested by the examiner.

Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 124-125 and 130-146 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over the combined teachings of Janka and AAPA.

Drawings

Applicants propose that Figure 1 will be corrected to include the legend "Prior Art" to reflect that that which is illustrated is old.

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All of the stated grounds of objection and rejection are believed to have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicant therefore respectfully requests that the Examiner reconsider all presently outstanding objections and rejections and that they be withdrawn. Applicant believes that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action and, as such, the present application is in condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number provided.

Prompt and favorable consideration of this Amendment is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank C. Turner
Attorney for Applicant
Reg. No. 39,863

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Chevron Services Company
1111 Bagby, Suite 4040
Houston, Texas 77002
(713) 752 3084 (voice)
(713) 752 7969 (fax)